

## "Representative Material"

# Hills Snyder

at Rose Amarillo

by John Ewing

The object next to the door is the shape, size and color of a banana. But looks can be deceiving.

"It's yellow not because bananas are yellow but because the door is blue," says Hills Snyder. He's describing "Lift", one of nine pieces shown in June at Rose Amarillo, Ken Little's exhibition space near the UTSA downtown campus. "Representative Material" continues Snyder's work with plexiglass and the "overlap of representation and abstraction." Including the viewer in this dynamic, Snyder breaks everyday objects down into their constituent graphic parts. He then reconstructs the deracinated elements into new physical expressions. The experience of the mundane is refreshed by our inclusion in this interplay of image and object.

There is no particular rhyme nor reason to this selection of root objects. It's a random collection including crosses, a domino, a smiley face and a shoe, all of it rendered meaningless as a symbol system by its randomness. Most favored of the Surrealist strategies, this disconnection of object and vested meaning fueled much of Magritte's oeuvre, as in the painting "The Key of Dreams," where objects cannot be perceived within a rational system of understood. In this liberated state, the objec-

tive for the viewer is to explore different relationships between concepts and objects, and between objects and themselves.

Snyder invites this formal exploration with a set of rules that harmonizes the objects. All evolve two to four inches out of the picture plane on meticulously-constructed birch casements painted black. The objects' acrylic-sheet "faces" are attached to their solid-state casements with brass hardware. This careful construction is emphatic in reconfirming objecthood on the flat, two-dimensional images. These are the "gestures," says Snyder, "which provide the movement wanted in the space."

The "gestures" are placed around half of the gallery in a delightful unconventional manner, each one carefully lit with its own dedicated spotlight (another harmonizing rule). Low on a wall is "Frin," a small abstracted figure combining triangular shapes. Its reflective purple face casts an attenuated double onto the gallery floor. Above the viewer's head, the opaque yellow "Lift" matches bright-for-bright with the blue door and casts a sharp shadow double along its bottom edge. "Blue Seven," with its opaque blue face, might have been a woman's high-heeled pump in another, primordial incarnation. Here, up-ended onto its toe where it touches the gallery floor, it has a different life and its own essence to express.



Installation view of Hill Snyder's exhibition at Rose Amarillo

In a corner, "Green Basket" ups the ante, engaging the viewer in object identification and incorporating him in the process. A silhouette of a handled basket (an Easter basket, if you must) is made from two mirrored panels joined at a right angle. One is blue, and the other is yellow. Because of the angle, they reflect into each other, generating a wholly-separate green basket deep within the mirror. The viewer is in the reflection with the basket, and as with all mirrors, the sensual perception of depth is in conflict with an understanding of the hard, reflective surface.

The rest of the works on the other side of the gallery start with these perceptual themes and harmonizing rules and go further. "Red Rider" is the largest, incorporating everything. Across the breadth of the gallery, it sets up an

opposition: symbolic meaning versus meaningless form, tangible object versus intangible image. On one wall is mounted an 8ft. casement cross with a mirrored face. A theatrical lamp shines out of an aperture at the crossing, casting a large, tangerine-colored circle onto the opposite wall. Eyes and a grin are painted on the wall and combine with the light to create an immense smiley face.

"Red Rider" begs for viewer interaction. Standing in front of the cross, the viewer can encase himself completely within the mirror. Carefully avoiding the blinding light, it is difficult but possible to see oneself in the mirror, the warm, orange light mimicking the late afternoon sun on one's head and the smiley face behind. Music also emanates from the aperture, a dreamy mix of sampled genres. The com-

bined effect of light, heat, steel-guitar and one's own image in the foreground of the reflection is a generous experience for both the senses and the ego.

From the other direction, the smiley face looms large, dominating the viewer with a placid, static expression. It seems unchanging, immutable, partly because the facial features

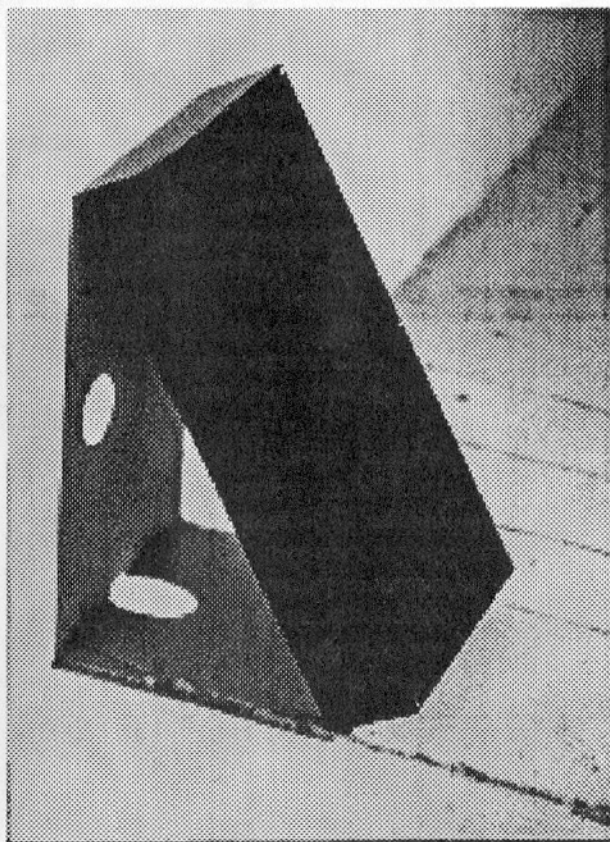
marketing symbol which no longer contains any meaning at all. Somehow, the two are in perfect balance.

The remaining works add subtle shadings to "Red Rider's" master stroke. "At the Heel" incorporates a t-joint in the gallery's exposed plumbing. The smiley face afterburn tricks the viewer's eye into thinking it sees a red shadow behind the pipe, and in a double-cross, it does. A transparent sheet of fluorescent red acrylic mimics the shadow cast by the pipe, cooperating with it to create the piece.

"AC/DC" is another, smaller cross with an opaque, white surface. A portion of a black smiley face is captured on the white acrylic. But, like a print, there is only as much image as there is surface to transfer it. In no way symbolic, the relationship between the image and the object is merely physical.

Finally, "Interlude" approaches the image/object construct from the opposite tack. Leaning against a wall, it's a small, black rectangle pierced with three holes. The object essence of "domino" is conferred upon it only if the viewer leans over to see the white wall paint through the holes. Using visual cues, the viewer reconstructs the familiar pattern and makes a positive I.D.

In playful and provocative ways, "Representative Material" continues the important discussion of art's capacity to communicate. In Hills Snyder's world, the relationship between objects and meaning, signs and signifieds, is malleable, changing and often reflexive. Like Duchamp's urinal or The Golden Arches, objects can become symbols and vice versa. Who knows? Maybe objects have an agenda of their own. Anything can develop, over time and with use.



"Interlude" by Hills Snyder

are painted and not projected. The intensity of the color imprints and distorts sight, creating color-saturated shadows in the viewer's peripheral vision. Conceptually, the piece is a standoff between an object that has trouble throwing off its accrued meaning and a bloated